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DE RUEHMO #1935 1891408
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 071408Z JUL 08
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8924

UNCLAS MOSCOW 001935

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SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [SENV](#) [AORC](#) [EAGR](#) [ETRD](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: RUSSIA FAVORS FLEXIBLE APPROACH ON MERCURY

REF: A. STATE 63943
[1](#)B. MOSCOW 1816

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[1](#)1. (SBU) On July 3, we discussed the October 2008 UNEP-hosted Mercury Working Group Meeting with Vladimir Lenev, Counselor in the Global Environment and Health Section of the MFA's International Organizations Department. Lenev confirmed, as discussed in Ref B, that a consensus had not yet emerged on the best way to address mercury in the international arena during GOR interagency discussions between the MFA and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology. Lenev noted that the GOR's approach to mercury was flexible and had been evolving over time. At the February 2005 UNEP Governing Council meeting in Nairobi, Russia initially favored the USG view of a non-binding international partnership on mercury, but at the February 2007 UNEP meeting, Russia was more in favor of the EU position in support of a binding international agreement.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Lenev thought that the best approach was to move forward on parallel tracks. Interested nations could participate immediately in a voluntary agreement or partnership on mercury, while they also continued discussing, possibly for years, the merits of a binding agreement. Lenev also said that Russia was ultimately looking for a cost-effective and inexpensive resolution of all heavy metals in one package, including mercury, lead and cadmium, as that would make for a more efficient international process than addressing each of the heavy metals individually. Lenev noted that some voices within the GOR wanted to develop the government's environmental protection authority, but because of the slow bureaucratic pace of adopting domestic legislation, they were hoping for a binding international agreement to spur this development. In terms of international agreements, Lenev opined that Russia would favor addressing mercury through an amendment to an existing international agreement, such as the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, because it would be easier to gain Russian ratification of an amendment to an existing agreement than to go through the lengthy governmental approval process for a new international agreement.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Lenev noted that about one million tons of mercury waste had accumulated on Russian territory before the collapse of the Soviet Union. Lenev said that the GOR would be interested in deeper international cooperation on questions of mercury disposal, joint scientific studies on the environmental and health effects of mercury waste, development of alternative technologies to the use of mercury, and cooperation on mercury in arctic fora, given that mercury pollution was particularly acute in Russia's northern regions.

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